



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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MAYOR LIGHTFOOT ANNOUNCES MAYOR'S MEDAL OF HONOR

First annual award ceremony will honor individuals and organizations and their contributions during the COVID-19 pandemic

Chicago - Today, Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot announced the Mayor's Medal of Honor, a new Mayoral award that will honor individuals and organizations who have made extraordinary contributions to Chicago's residents throughout 2020 and particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Mayor's Medal of Honor will be an annual award presented by the Mayor to honorees who have demonstrated a passionate commitment to public service, to uplifting residents of Chicago's 77 neighborhoods, and to bettering the lives all who reside in the city.

"As we begin to see the light at the end of the long, dark COVID-19 tunnel we've been in, it is vitally important for us to take the time to recognize and honor those who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to support our city," said Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot. "This award will highlight and celebrate the individuals and organizations who have worked tirelessly to provide our residents with the resources they need to rise above and thrive long after this pandemic. I am beyond grateful for their contributions and thank them for helping to make Chicago a better place."

This year's Mayor's Medal of Honor awardees are:

INDIVIDUALS

- **Brad McConnell**, CEO, Allies for Community Business (formerly Accion): Brad helped lead and manage the Small Business Resiliency Fund, the largest small business loan program of its kind in the US.
- **Daniel Anello**, CEO, Kids First Chicago: Daniel led the critical partnership with the City, CPS and Internet providers to create the first comprehensive internet access program in Chicago, Chicago Connected.
- **Natasha Smith-Walker**, CEO, Project Exploration: Natasha led a network of youth-serving community organizations in Austin, which has become the



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model for the development of My CHI. My Future. networks in other Chicago neighborhoods.

- **Dr. Allison Arwady**, Commissioner, Chicago Department of Public Health: Commissioner Arwady has worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic and guided the City's response with health, safety, and equity as her north stars.
- **Dr. Helene Gayle**, President and Chief Executive Officer of Chicago Community Trust: Dr. Gayle stepped up to provide valuable expertise, guidance, leadership and resources throughout Chicago in all facets of the pandemic response and recovery.
- **Chef Erick Williams**, Executive Chef and Founder, Virtue: Chef Williams opened Virtue in Hyde Park with a commitment to promoting social justice and donating meals to frontline workers.
- **Dr. Nick Turkal**, Dr. Turkal came out of retirement to lead the medical team for the emergency McCormick Place alternate care facility during the early days of COVID.
- **Rosa Escareno**, Commissioner, Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection: Commissioner Escareno and her team have worked tirelessly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to support small business owners and protect Chicago workers and residents.
- **Zair Menjivar**, Belmont Cragin Youth Leadership Council: Zair is an exemplary youth leader who displayed an incredible commitment to public service in 2020.

ORGANIZATIONS & COLLABORATIVES

- **Greater Chicago Food Depository:** During the unprecedented food insecurity crisis brought on by the consequences of COVID-19, the GCFD responded by creating new structures to increase the amount of food going to new and existing partners.
- **Federally Qualified Health Centers:** The 22 FQHCs in Chicago have been invaluable partners in the fight against COVID-19, leading the City's on the ground, neighborhood efforts to keeping our residents safe and healthy, regardless of healthcare coverage, ability to pay, or citizenship status.
- **Rush Hospital:** As COVID-19 first hit Chicago, Rush mobilized tremendous resources to provide testing and treatment for patients, including accepting many transfers of some of the most acutely ill patients in Chicago, and helping to lead efforts to support individuals in shelters, while maintaining a tremendous support system for their many outstanding employees.
- **Gads Hill Early Childhoods Centers:** Throughout the pandemic, the Gads Hill Centers and their dedicated team adapted and remained open,



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



- supporting and the early learning and childcare needs for families of essential workers through home-based outreach and in-person education.
- **The City of Chicago's Racial Equity Rapid Response Team (RERRT):** The RERRT created a national model for COVID response by creating a data-driven, community-led, and collaborative approach to customizing hyper-local efforts that brought Education, Prevention, Testing and Treatment, and Basic Support resources directly to community members.
 - **CORE:** This innovative disaster-relief organization founded by Sean Penn, partnered with the City to stand-up free COVID testing in Chicago's the hardest-hit neighborhoods, supporting the city's equity-first approach.
 - **Pui Tak Center:** The Pui Tak Center stepped up to support wrap-around services to the hard-hit Asian American and Pacific Islander community during the pandemic.
 - **Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council Ballet Folklorico:** During the pandemic, a group of adult artists pivoted from its normal costume making process to supporting youth from the Chicago Youth Service Corps in making masks to be distributed in the Back of the Yards community.
 - **Koval Distillery:** The team at Koval showed incredible spirit and generosity in the early days of the pandemic by immediately pivoting their distillery to make gallons of alcohol-based hand sanitizer to fill a huge demand from first responders, local community organizations, essential businesses, and healthcare providers.

Together, and each in their own ways, these honorees truly embody the principle of leading by example, and centering equity as the guiding value of their work. An additional announcement will be made soon regarding another set of awards that will be given specifically to City employees who have displayed a similar passion and commitment to public service.

The Mayor, along with the entire City of Chicago is deeply honored and humbled to have such selfless, talented, and civic minded partners, and looks forward to the continuance of their outstanding work for years to come. A special ceremony honoring these incredible individuals, organizations, and collaboratives will be live streamed on April 20th.

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